

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**Dr. Ali al-Dabbagh, Spokesman, Government of Iraq**

**DATE: August 17, 2008**

**TRANSCRIBED BY:**

**SOS INTERNATIONAL LTD.**

**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Dr. Ali al-Dabbagh**

**REPORTERS:**

**Ahmed Jassem from Al-Arabiya  
Miguel Marquez from ABC News  
Sean Carberry from Public Radio International  
Carmen Gentile with Fox News  
Jonathan Blakely from National Public Radio**

**REPORTERS 1-24**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

In the name of God, negotiations are continuous between the Iraqi and U.S. officials between...about the security agreement. Some points needs some clarifications. Again, the Iraqi government assures it's...are sticking to the...it's holding to the statistics and is insistence...assisting and preserving the interests of the Iraqi people. The suggested agreement is going to be subject to the constitutional obligations starting from the approval of the ministers' councils and the Parliament and the parties through the political...the National Security Political Office. There have been some information about asking for the presence of six guards of Blackwater Company wanted in...engaged in shooting fire and injuring civilians. Iraqi government assures that Blackwater Company have made a crime and the...and is going to be sued. Yes, we may open the questions.

**REP1:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Doctor, currently you made a visit to Libya and met the Libyan president, Moammar Khadafi. During the visit, have you made an agreement? Or did you get promises from Al-Khadafi to support the political process in Iraq as he may open a Libyan embassy in Baghdad? Have you asked him to return back the Iraqi immigrants? Second question, is there an intention to open new embassies in

Iraq? And what are the countries that are going to open such embassies? Have you reached an agreement with Saudi concerning diplomacy?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

We have not asked Libya to send back the Iraqis who are there. They are not refugees, they help the Libyan citizens to build Libya—they are working there. They have some problems in issuing their passports. And we have talked with the Libyan president and he promised to solve the problems they're facing. And it's voluntarily; if they wish to get back to Iraq, we are welcoming the return whenever they wish to return. And if they wish to stay there, they are like our representatives in these countries. Twenty thousand of the individuals are in Libya now. About the diplomatic relations, it is up to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But the president of Libya expressed his will to cooperate with Iraq, and to open and have political representation in Iraq. We expect to have communication, not just with Libya, but many of Arab countries. Concerning opening the embassies, seven of the embassies are going to be opened. Some of the countries have taken buildings and they're under rehabilitation and furnishing. The countries are Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia. Now, the procedures

are undergoing with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We hope for it to speed up the steps and help our Iraqi...our Arab brothers in Iraq.

**REP2:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Doctor, the Parliament members, through their talks—subsidiary talks, not official talks—they have said talks about the negotiations with the U.S. concerning the security agreement; they said the negotiations are stopped. In your point of view, do you think the two sides are going to reach an agreement that would please both parts, or do you think the negotiations are going to collapse?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** The resentment matter, it is not a formal or official information. There are some grounds that we are holding onto and we are not going to give up on them. The U.S. side is well aware about this. We have been facing the outlaws and the insurgency. They are targeting the U.S. Army and the Iraqi Army. That's why we need a set of criteria for their presence in Iraq. The criteria is support...is claimed by the Iraqi government. We need the suggestions by the Iraqi representative to be taken in consideration. It is not a big deal. It is....

**REP3:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Some part...some sides have mentioned there are some reasons that are hindering the way to reach an agreement. Would you please give us some of these reasons that are in the way of reaching an agreement between the two countries? Thank you.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Frankly, there are a number of points. It is technical issues. Mostly it is...once you get...it cannot get the...all the details once you get on one detail, you get into subsidiary details. Maybe to time...timetable and the figures of unity for...and guards issues. But on the basic headlines, there is an agreement...an approval. We want to protect Iraq's sovereignty. We, as Iraqi side, we consider these points does not meet...these points do not meet the points...the stable points that we are looking for. We cannot give total descriptions about the points that we are agreeing upon. Today we may agree; tomorrow we may not. These points are up to the Iraqi representative to talk about. Yes.

**REP4:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Doctor, Arab League asked, not long time ago, that...to be acquainted about the points of the agreement. And did the Arab

League know about the agreement? And what was their point of view about it?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

What our concern is the interests of the Iraqi people. The Iraqi decision-maker is the one who should be aware of the agreement. We are not going to exclude the Arab League. And we are not...at the same time, we are not obliged to acknowledge them. This agreement is not going to affect the far or the close neighbors, among them, the Arab League. The things that we are going to approve, you...all of them are going to approve upon. We're sure of that.

**REP5:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Lately, the suicide bombers incident have been escalating. Do you have some programs to aware women about such incidents?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

The suicide bomb...female suicide bombers incident is conducted by al-Qaida, not necessarily because they are having a shortage in men, but the disguise for women is easier. That's why this devel- ...this evil groups are trying to exploit women and utilize them in

this way. This is not the government's responsibility, but all of the governmental institutions for the misconception of the Islamic religion and rules. This is...this thing need to be cured. The Iraqi government need to use its constitutional rights in pursuing these individuals, whether women or men. It's not in Iraq, but also in the region. Yes, sir.

**REP6:** As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Ahmed Jassem. [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Media sources affirm that Sadr Trend is going to form military force to target U.S. military bases in Iraq. What is the U.S. situation from this statement?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Iraqi government is a constitutionally elected government. It has total right to protect Iraq. There is no other government may share the Government of Iraq in taking any security decision. The Iraqi government is here with the approval of the Iraqi Parliament. So, any targeting for any of the forces under the pretext of terrorism, the Iraqi government is obliged to impose the law on them.

**REP7:** As-Salāmu `Alaykum. [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Is there a project to provoke immunity from Blackwater Company...

to revoke immunity from Blackwater Company?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

All contracting parts in Iraq, they do not have immunity in Iraq. Once Iraq is out of the...of seventh chapter, there would be no immunity. The talks now around several immunities concerning the available force, the immunities are...can be recognizable and it is among the points that we are talking about and discussing. It is not disputable, but we're going to talk about them later.

**REP8:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum, Doctor. [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

There is big dispute concerning the agreement, the Iraqi agreement...the long-term agreement. We see some fake atmosphere around this. Why you do not let the Iraqi street aware of the results of this agreement? We do not see it but casted through media. Do you have a plan to do that?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Yes, sure. Of course. But there is no agreement until now in order for us to publish it. The points are changing and different formulas. Once we reach the final formula, the first one is to see it is going to be the Iraqi people. The Iraqi government is taking into

consideration that the Iraqi people are going to understand the trends and...of the government. The whole points are going to be submitted to the Iraqi people. Even if the Iraqi government is going to reject it, the Iraqi people are going to be the first to know about this.

**REP9:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** How much have you accomplished of this agreement? And are you going to include in some of its item to determine the destiny of the foreign forces' existence in Iraq?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** You mean other than the American forces by the foreign forces?

**REP9:** [Responds in Arabic.]

**INT:** Multi-National Force, I mean.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** We cannot give a number...a percentage about the agreement. The agreement...we are optimistic that we're going to reach an agreement that's going to preserve the interests of Iraq and its population...the interests of its population with the U.S. We have

some major points we are working on agreeing upon. Concerning the existence of the forces, it is within timetable. The Iraqi government made it clear that within a few years the multi-national existence is going to be determined upon the circumstances on the ground and the threats faced by Iraq, whether it was interior or from outside.

**REP10:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** How much flexibility is the U.S. side offering or showing? Do you...you mentioned you are optimistic. Do you expect that before the end of the current month you are going to reach the agreement? Are you going to prolong the existence of the Multi-National Force in Iraq for another year? Concerning the military operation in Basra, Mosul, now in Diyala, there are some negative results. Now we see the violence is coming back in these areas. In Diyala, some operations are stopped now. How do you...?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** As for prolonging the existence of the Multi-National Force, the Iraqi government adopted the...that...a special trend that this year is going to be the last year for the existence of the Multi-National Force in Iraq. And the forces need to be reformed according to what

Iraq asks and the needs of the Iraqi government and the needs of the security situation. We are not going to accept the existence of the Multi-National Force by the way stated by the UN in which they have taken total control from the...Iraq. We're going to find some substitute of this...some alternative for this. This is what we are seeking...the Iraqi government is seeking.

**REP10:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Concerning the second question.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** You mean the other forces?

**REP10:** [Speaks briefly in Arabic without translation.]

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** I believe there is some agenda and goals for each sides of the sides to achieve them through a political vision that would emerge from these negotiations. The Iraqi side believes there is cooperation from the side...of the U.S. side to meet the needs of Iraq and of the Iraqis [unintelligible] and Iraqi interests. Other issues that the U.S. side sees, there is some...the U.S. forces needs lots of flexibility and

permission and authorization...special authorization. And this is for the Iraqi side, it is unacceptable in certain areas since this would contradict with the stable points that we are asking for. As for the operations, as you know, the situation in Mosul, Mosul is a red zone. It is exceptional situation when you compare it with Diyala and Basra. The operations in Diyala are not retreating, it is continuous. There is obvious improvement that goes beyond the expectation of the security systems. We expect in Mosul there would be some intense in operations once we determine the leaders there.

**REP11:**

Dr. Dabbagh, how are you? Miguel Marquez with ABC News. Perhaps this is an issue of translation, but it was just translated that you said with regard to the status of forces agreement that this is the last year for MNF-I, that it must be reformed. I'm curious. Can you elucidate a little bit on that or discuss a little more about that? And is there an urgency on the part of the Iraqi government to get it done before President Bush leaves office, or is there some thinking that perhaps doing it later is perfectly acceptable? And if I may, just one other small point. You brought up Blackwater in your initial statement and I'm just curious, is there something in this statement...or in the status of forces agreement that would hinder the Iraqi government from suing Blackwater? Is that the concern?

Thank you.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Let me start with the last point. There is no point in the agreement that would refer to Blackwater issue, but it is general. The contractors related to the forces that including them, Blackwater Company, since it would describe itself as a special-protection company. It is still subject to this description, which is not going to give it any immunity in Iraq. Iraqi government is seeking to impose its total control on the security situation. As for the prolongation, it is going to be the last prolongation. There are going to be other formulas and dealing. One of them is the Iraqi funds. As you know, the seventh chapter gives Iraqi funds immunity. That's why we need to have another formula with the UN to deal the fu-...the Iraqi funds immunity once Iraq is going to be out of the seventh chapter. That's why we're looking with the UN about alternatives to...about the seventh chapter that is protecting the Iraqi funds. Iraqi government did not want to let its forces and foreign existence for the same situation. We need to look for other alternatives that would give total sovereignty to Iraq. Iraqi government is not linked...tied with timetables concerning the agreement. The basic...the basics that we are asking is stated by the Iraqi

government. Once they are met, the Iraqi government is ready to sign the agreement within the basics once they met. If they do not meet the basics, it is not subject to the period of President Bush.

**REP12:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** U.S. Embassy announced its approval on approving scholarships. Is there some kind of coordination between the U.S. Embassy and the Iraqi government concerning this?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** The Iraqi government has a trend and an approach of increasing the scholarships abroad, whether from students and officials of those who wish to get a higher grade. Iraqi government is working on sending 10,000 students per year. Until we reach this number, we need some time. But the Iraqi government have talked to several sides, among them the U.S. side, in order to facilitate the visa. And the Iraqi government and the U.S. Embassy have approved on this and this is part of the effort the Iraqi government is working on.

**REP13:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** There is a U.S. statement that Iran is training militia elements – Iran and Hezbollah – and they're arranging their infiltration to Iraq. My

second question. The president asked to fill the post caused...fill the vacancy.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

I don't...I can't say what the president...the Iranian president is referring to. The Iraqi side is the one who was to decide the security situation. Only the Iraq side. And the Iraqi side is going to fill the vacancy once it happens due to the withdrawal of some forces from certain positions. There is no filling vacancy going to be done outside the Iraqi security force from any other countries – not from U.S., not from any other country other than Iraq – once we have now reached the level that we...the Iraqi force can control the security. We do not accept such statements. And concerning militias, the Iraqi government stance from this is obvious. We are standing against any groups that may threaten the security.

**REP14:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

There are some steps and decisions approved by the government in order to return the displaced...the immigrants from outside and from inside. How do you intend to gain the trust of the citizens? Second question. What are the most important political trends that are facing the work of the government as you witness the newborn of

new challenges and new allies? What are the negative trends that are facing the government?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

The security situation is expected. We did not expect that the violence is going to lower 'til zero ground. But there is a tilt...in general, there is some decrease and it is witnessed by the Iraqi citizens. This situation is allowing the return of the displaced and the immigrants. We are expecting a big return within the beginning of the school year because the security situation is suitable and the Iraqi government is willing and ready to do all that it takes. This does not...there is some areas in which there are some terror operations are conducted. The...these operations made...these operations would not give, in conclusion, the citizen the sense that the security is not stable. As the Iraqi government see, this is the democratic Iraq and these alliances are newborn alliances coming from political understanding. This is political Iraq. The government does not get involved in it. But this is a healthy Iraq. It's going to help the democratic process.

**REP15:**

Thank you. Sean Carberry with Public Radio International program, "America Abroad." Currently, U.S. Provincial Reconstruction

Teams are working around the country at local and provincial levels to help rebuild local infrastructure, but help build Iraqi capacity to run these programs, run essential services, and local governance. Are these efforts making a difference? Are you seeing positive results? What's the timeline for Iraq to be able to take over this type of work on its own? And when will Iraq begin using its own funds to fund all of these projects that the PRTs are currently working on?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Iraq is using its funds and resources. Yes, it is not within our expectations, but once the...now the increases...the allocations are increased, \$70 billion now are allocated. The PRT is participating in very important role in helping Iraqis in achieving projects. I believe Iraq is going to need important expertise. Iraq is going to still need foreign expertise and foreign experts until it's going to depend on itself after we have been away from the world. Now, we see there is progress on the technical and fund level, and we're using the Iraqi resources.

**REP16:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

There are some political trends that are accusing other trends that they are working on some Turkish agenda inside Iraq concerning

Kirkuk. The Iraqi government said more than time that the security situation has improved. Do you see a need for the security agreement...Iraqi-U.S. security agreement?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

The Iraqi government does not see some intrusion...Turkish intrusion in the Iraqi issues. We have clarified the situation. And the Iraqi government have made it clear to the Turkish side that Iraq is not allowing any part to intrude, even the Turkish side. I do not think that the Turkish government is going to violate this trend. The security agreement, it is not just security. Part of it is security; the other part is political. Some of it is economic and cultural. But we are focusing on the security side as it is issues that are related to Iraqi sovereignty. Iraq is looking for what it would suit its needs and interests. The security improvement helped us to have better negotiations. We have Iraqi troops that are...that have reached a very good level that may cut the time of the existence of the foreign existence. We want...this helped us to reach a better agreement with the U.S. part.

**REP17:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

You've mentioned we cannot use any soldier outside the Iraqi

system. Do you think that the Iraqi forces are well qualified, like 100%—the equipment, the numbers?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

The equipment are not enough of course. Iraq does not have all the measures like weapons or techniques that are available in...with other armies. We do not have it...Iraqi Army doesn't have it. We are in the process of building in order to reach the acceptable level. The arming situation now is not acceptable, and we need time. I just said we do not need additional soldiers as the available ones are more than enough within.... With the Iraqi side, we can face any threat. Iraqi government is working on becoming stability element in the region and to prevent any dispute by building interests...common interests with the countries around.

**REP18:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

The Peshmerga, with withdrawal from Jalawla and Khanaqin, how do you see the [unintelligible]? And have you expressed any pressure on the Peshmerga in order to withdraw? And about Kirkuk, what are the following steps in order to have the provincial elections?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Peshmerga played a big role in Khanaqin and other areas. And due to security situations, they need...we needed them there and they have accomplished their work. And we...the Iraqi government thanked them. But there are some security operations that the Iraqi...the federal Iraqi forces are conducting. And this force is going to control the areas away from Kurdistan region. That's why we expressed our wish for them to withdraw. And they are going to join the force and are going to be subject for the criteria asked by the Ministry of Defense. The Peshmerga are going to be subject to the Iraqi federal criteria. As long for Kirkuk, Kirkuk has a certain special situation. And Iraqi government believe there should be some kind of agreement. No solution can be imposed by any part because we are going to face problems we do not need.

**REP19:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

After the security improvement witnessed by Baghdad and other provinces, the government is focusing on reconstruction. Do you...can you tell us about this? And the UN have expressed its intention to open new offices in Baghdad. How is that going to help in the reconstruction of Iraq?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

The development for now is from one year. We do not have more than one year development planned. This is one of the issues we are suffering from. There is a big approach as the ministerial council that to have strategic projects would last more than one year in the country. This is the approach the government adopting for the time being. We hope by the end of this year the Ministry of Planning is going to give us something for major development projects. The UN is not concerned with reconstruction. The UN have certain...has certain services according to what the Iraqi government would ask for. The UN haven't played a big role in Iraq but we encourage. And according to the requests of the Iraqi government, the UN is going to offer its services.

**REP20:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

U.S. media agencies mentioned U.S. intelligence have offered Iraq a list of possible targets by the special groups. The targets are judges and officials. Did the Iraqi government really receive such a list?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

I don't have criti-...I don't have precise information about this. I

need....

**REP21:** Carmen Gentile with Fox News. U.S. military officials have recently expressed concern that the redeployment of Georgian forces and other in the Multi-National Force could hinder the long-term redeployment of U.S. forces. What's the Iraqi government's position on that?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** I don't understand the question.

**REP21:** What is...the U.S. military officials have expressed concern that the recent redeployment of Georgian forces could, in fact, influence the long-term redeployment of U.S. forces.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** Okay. [Continues in Arabic.]

**INT:** We believe as Iraqi government that we can fill the vacancies caused by the redeploying or withdrawing Georgian forces. The Iraqi government's...the Iraqi forces are in a situation that allows them to take the place of any withdrawing force.

**REP21:** One other question. In your statement off the top, you said that the status of forces agreement would have to be approved by the

Parliament, the Presidency Council, and then political parties. Can you go into a bit more of the approval mechanism? Who will have to approve it and how will they have to do it? The Parliament by 50 plus 1?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

There are constitutional measures. The political office is...consists of a number of blocs. The National Security Political Office, once it approves on accepting the draft, it means that it would go to the minister councils and to the Council of Representatives. This is...we have approved on this mechanism in order to help facilitate the decision-making. The Council of Ministers and the Parliament are going to be offered the draft in order to either approve on it or reform it.

**REP22:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

As for the political office for national security, the officials...the minority officials and voices. The decisions are connected to this council and they do not have representatives in the political...the National Security Political Office. Do you think this subject with contracting with democracy, this is a fair state? Secondly, the Iraqis who have returned from Egypt, there are some problems about the

funds allocated to them and for accommodation. We need some information about the residents about these families and are they being granted what they have been promised by the Iraqi government?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

I cannot give you details about the accommodations. But the Iraqi government, in general, has this approach of facilitating everything for them. We are going to offer them whatever we can. The Ministry of Immigration and Immigrants is dealing with this issue. The political office, it is like a political kitchen in which the agreements are going to either approved upon or not. As you have seen, the Iraqi Council of Representatives used its veto right. And once the Parliament representatives see that they can hinder any decision taken by the political...National Political Office, this is a democracy.

**REP23:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

You have talked about the security agreement, but you did not give us the names of the negotiating team.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** The negotiating team headed by Mohammad Hammoud, undersecretary of the ministry of foreign affairs. It's consisting of experts of security, economic, legal, legal experts. The goal is not to have a political sharing in this negotiating delegation as much as we wanted to express the wish and the will of the political parts. The negotiating team so far have achieved a good role.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** Last question.

**INT:** Last question.

**REP24:** Jonathan Blakely from National Public Radio. About provincial elections—oh, sorry. About provincial elections, there was a recent article in the American press, *USA Today*, if you recall that article about shenanigans and voter intimidation with new registered voters. It also said that there are only about a million new registered voters in the country. First of all, did you see that article? Can you comment?

**DR AL-DABBAGH:** Yes, it is this one.

**REP24:** Ah, good.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

Okay.

**REP24:**

Can you just talk overall about the importance of the provincial elections? When might they be held? And just...can you clarify some of the things that were in that article and talk about that? Thank you.

**DR AL-DABBAGH:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:**

The article published by *U.S. Today* (sic) talks about some of the violations on some voting centers. Yes, it is expected to witness such violations. But we are pursuing such incidents. As for the provincial elections, is to update the voters' data about the names. We have 17 million Iraqis at the commission. We're going to register the new ones that were born in 1990 and they now are authorized to vote. We're going to update the voters' data for them. As you see, the picture here shows big attraction towards updating the data. As you see, because the time is about to expire...the duration is about to expire and the citizens are aware that one...the person needs to update his information is welcomed to do so. The government is asking the citizens to hurry up and update their data. And the Iraqi government is going to call upon all citizens to participate positively in forming the provincial councils and it is a

right for them. Thank you.